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SENIOR INTERDEPARTMENTAL GROUP

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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GROUP I
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C O N T E N T S

| | <u>Page</u> |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| 25X6 | |
| 1. [REDACTED] | 1 |
| 2. Congo | 2 |
| 3. Nigeria | 3 |
| 4. Panama. | 4 |
| 5. Brazil. | 5 |
| 6. Gibraltar | 6 |

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Approved For Release 2002/01/30 : CIA-RDP79T0826A001400010002-8

25X6

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2. CONGO

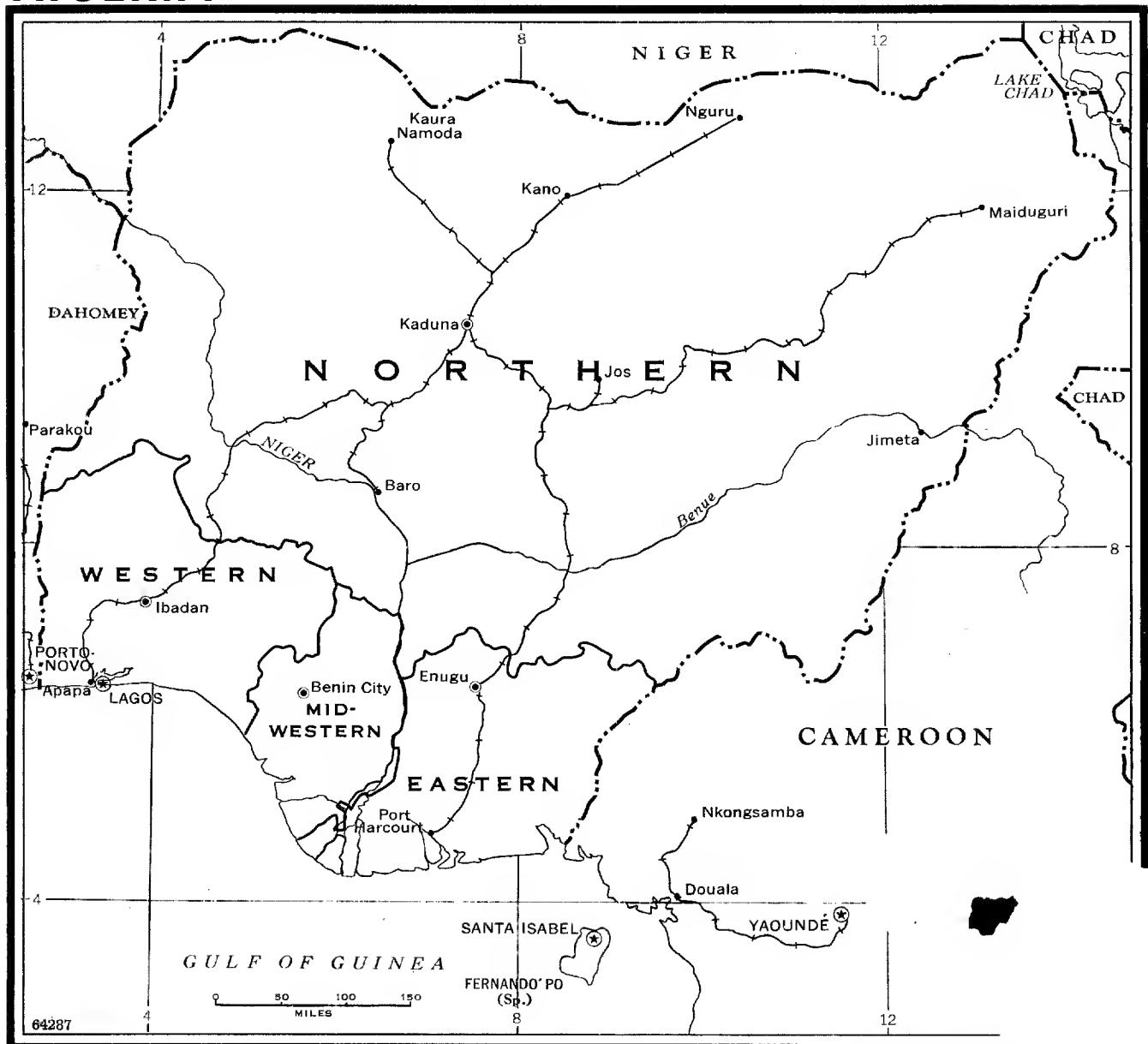
President Mobutu's sensitivity to any reflections on his ability to control the Congo or to anything that appears to call into question his own independence from foreign influence is likely periodically to produce tense moments in his relations with the US.

Mobutu and his associates have been telling US officials that the Congo Government must acquire a more "nationalistic" image in order to blunt attacks from radicals at home and elsewhere in Africa. Mobutu has almost certainly taken to heart the advice Tanzania's Julius Nyerere gave him in June to deal more aggressively with the West, and he says he hopes by such nationalistic tactics to unite the Congo behind him and turn it into a major African power. He almost certainly feels a need for the maneuvering room he would obtain from broadened contacts with radical African and Communist countries, and he asserts such contacts can be closely controlled.

Complicating and to some extent vitiating this attempt at Realpolitik, however, are the weaknesses for which Mobutu has long been known. He is naive and impetuous, he has an exaggerated concept of the degree to which he has solved the Congo's problems, and he is inordinately sensitive to any sign that his control may not be as complete as he thinks it is. When something does go wrong--as it often does in the Congo--and when Mobutu cannot ignore it, he frequently seems more interested in finding an external scapegoat than in getting to the root of the difficulty.

In these circumstances outside powers, including the US, are likely to find themselves accused of various sins of omission or commission, whatever they do. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM/BACKGROUND USE ONLY)

NIGERIA



3. NIGERIA

In the continuing absence of effective action by Lt. Col. Gowon's federal government to hold the country together, the Eastern Region seems likely to formalize its existing near-independence before long (see map). A further fragmentation of the country would probably ensue.

Anger and bitterness have swelled at all levels of society in the predominantly Ibo East as over 300,000 refugees, many maimed, have returned following the recent large-scale attacks on Ibos in the Northern Region. This has given strong new impetus to secessionist pressures generated last July when Northern military elements destroyed the former Ibo-led national regime and purged Ibo personnel from most army units.

Eastern military governor Ojukwu, who has gone his own way in many respects since July, still professes interest in a loose confederation. However, he has indicated the East will not participate further in interregional constitutional talks unless Gowon meets impossible preconditions. The talks resumed today without the East, following a three-week recess.

Last week Ojukwu seemed to regard Eastern secession as inevitable and said the next "three to six weeks" would be decisive. His chief concern at present probably centers on remedying the weapons deficiency of the army elements in the East--now composed entirely of Easterners. Eastern agents appear to have made firm arrangements with at least one European arms dealer for clandestine deliveries.

Gowon's weak government seems incapable of meeting, or even appreciating the essential needs, practical and psychological, of the aggrieved East. Moreover, the breakdown of discipline in the more numerous army forces at Lagos' disposal is so serious that they would probably be unable to suppress an early secessionist move by the East, although an attempt to do so cannot be ruled out.

Any such resort to force would only further embitter the parties and add to the difficulties facing the US which, in any event, will be importuned by both sides. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM/BACKGROUND USE ONLY)

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4. PANAMA

Former president Arnulfo Arias is continuing his efforts to touch off antigovernment action, but he appears willing to wait for the outcome of canal treaty negotiations before attempting a full-scale confrontation with the Robles regime.

Arias and his top aides are reported to be encouraging agitation among the country's most volatile and disaffected elements--students and urban slum dwellers. In exchange for a student commitment to agitate against the canal negotiations and alleged government repressive measures, Arias and National Assembly deputies of his Panamenista Party (PP) reportedly plan to push a political amnesty bill for imprisoned Communists. Arias followers also have been stirring up residents of tenement districts in Panama City. One usually reliable source reports that the PP is covertly collaborating with the Communists in this endeavor.

Since the assembly convened on 1 October, PP and other opposition deputies have introduced a flood of bills which have popular appeal but which the government will be forced to oppose because of their prohibitive cost.

Arias still maintains that he wants to avoid bloodshed, but it is clear that he has altered his policy of watchful waiting to one of cautious encouragement of antiregime activity. This tactic appears designed to erode public support for the Panamanian President. In all probability, Arias does not believe he yet has a clear-cut issue which would ensure popular backing for a decisive move. He is hoping such an issue will be provided later by dissatisfaction with a canal settlement. Arias wants to be the president who negotiates a treaty and warns he will oppose any canal compact achieved by Robles.

The next likely dates for trouble are 3-5 November and 28 November when the country celebrates national holidays and extremist-led students traditionally stage antigovernment and anti-US demonstrations.
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5. BRAZIL

President Castello Branco's decision to force Congress into recess until 22 November has added to the uncertainty surrounding the 15 November congressional elections.

The President acted after Chamber of Deputies president Cardoso and some opposition party members defied presidential orders unseating six congressmen and revoking their political rights for ten years. Cardoso refused to recognize Castello Branco's authority--derived from the 1964 revolution--to cancel congressional mandates without ratification by the Congress itself. He permitted those ousted to remain and several made strong antigovernment speeches.

The President reportedly is considering revoking the political rights of as many as 500 more opposition party members, including some congressmen. Most will probably be accused of corruption or of conspiring with exiled political opposition figures such as former presidents Goulart and Kubitschek.

Although the moves will neutralize and cow much of the opposition, they may backfire on pro-government congressional candidates. A confidant of Castello Branco maintains that his actions are not motivated by fear of losing the elections. Rather, he claims, they are a "house-cleaning" measure which the President believes necessary to provide a stable political base for president-elect Arthur da Costa e Silva, who assumes office on 15 March 1967.

The government's actions are sure to lend substance to widespread criticism of the regime as a military dictatorship. The President's actions are supported by Costa e Silva and by most of the Brazilian military and security forces. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

6. GIBRALTAR

London expects Spain to reject its proposal to submit the Gibraltar dispute to the International Court of Justice and to intensify pressure on the colony. Madrid has formally requested London to stop using the airfield in the neutral zone for military craft, and London now looks for a series of moves aimed at physically impeding or denying its use of the field. Spain could also increase restrictions on traffic to Gibraltar and impose a variety of other harassing actions. Madrid continues to seek US support in the dispute. It has warned of repercussions for US defense interests, such as nuclear overflights and the US-Spanish defense agreement which will be up for renewal in 1968, if Spain is rebuffed. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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